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LETTER DATED 22 MAY 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GEORGIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of a statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia regarding the recent development of events in Abkhazia, Georgia.

May I ask your kind assistance in having the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Peter CHKHEIDZE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia expresses its deep concern at the current development of events in Abkhazia, Georgia, namely in its Gali region.

Over the most recent period of time, crimes perpetrated in this region by the separatist regime have assumed an all the more ferocious character. Pogroms against the civilian population and hostage-taking, including of women and children, are continuous and systematic.

Just the fact of the execution of teenagers in front of their parents in April 1998 (S/1998/329) is more than enough to illustrate the cruelty with which the so-called Abkhaz militia carries out its operations.

The returnees, whose return to the region was brought about through international efforts, are growing conscious of the inevitability of defending themselves with arms, particularly in view of the flagging international control of the situation and with no conditions for the implementation of the decision of 28 April 1998 of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)-Council of Heads of State on additional measures for the settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia (S/1998/372).

The tension reached its climax on 19 and 20 May when the Georgian population of the villages of Sida, Repo-Etseri, Khumushkhuri and Zemo Bargebi were subjected to a full-scale punitive operation by a unit of some 300 heavily armed Abkhaz militia. Some civilians have been taken hostage and a number of houses ransacked, plundered and set on fire.

During the clashes, the separatists employed anti-aircraft weapons. The local population responded with armed resistance to the raiders. Casualties are reported on the both sides as a result.

Although the clashes have subsided, the situation remains highly precarious and tense. Eight hundred Abkhaz militiamen have been concentrated in the city of Gali, scaring innocent civilians out of their houses again.

The Ministry is gravely concerned at the calls of the so-called Parliament of Abkhazia to terminate the peacekeeping operation and to wage another genocide against the Georgian population. The well-contrived scheme of the Abkhaz side is first to provoke Georgian resistance and then to suppress it with bloody terror.

The Government of Georgia:

Strongly condemns any attempt to escalate the tension and to provoke violence, regardless of where it comes from, and reiterates its full commitment to the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

Calls on the Abkhaz side to use common sense and good judgement, recalling the perilous consequences of the armed confrontation, both for the welfare of the population of the region and the prospect of future economic reconstruction.

Expresses its readiness to renew, forthwith, the dialogue within the framework of the Geneva process under the auspices of the United Nations and with international participation, to intensify the bilateral meetings of the sides and to actively support the humanitarian and confidence-building efforts.

Expresses confidence that the Security Council will take the necessary measures to ensure the safety and normal functioning of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia, which will significantly contribute to putting an end to the impunity and to the reinvigoration of the peace process.

Expresses strong confidence that the Russian Federation, as facilitator, which at present is bearing the whole burden of the CIS peacekeeping operation, will make every effort to carry out its obligations and implement the decision of the CIS Council.

Appeals to the United Nations and the Security Council to continue their tireless efforts to achieve a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia.